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ABSTRACT

This report provides an overview of selected state strategies for addressing personnel shortages in the area of visual impairments. Innovative or alternative routes to certification in six states (Texas, Hawaii, Iowa, North Carolina, Utah, and West Virginia) are profiled to give specific examples of state approaches to personnel preparation and certification in this area. Telephone interviews were conducted with state directors of special education, other state education agency staff, educational service center staff, superintendents and administrators from schools for students with blindness, and administrators and faculty from institutions of higher education (IHEs). The interviews took place in August and September 1999 and lasted between 30 to 90 minutes each. A total of 13 people were interviewed. For each state, the origin, components, recruitment efforts, funding, and outcomes of the alternative certification program are described. Results of the survey indicate that all the states profiled use some sort of collaboration, including partnerships with IHEs, educational service centers, schools for the blind, and other state and local agencies. While some states rely on informal promotions of their certification programs, others target specific individuals or locations within the state in order to recruit students of a particular cultural or ethnic background. (CR)

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NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE DIRECTORS OF SPECIAL EDUCATION, INC.

PROJECT FORUM

QUICK TURN AROUND

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF A CRITICAL ISSUE IN SPECIAL EDUCATION

SELECTED STATE STRATEGIES FOR ADDRESSING PERSONNEL SHORTAGES IN THE AREA OF VI

By
PATRICE LINEHAN

MAY 2000

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Quick Turn Around

Project FORUM

QTA – A brief analysis of a critical issue in special education

Selected State Strategies for Addressing Personnel Shortages in the Area of VI

By Patrice Linehan

May 2000

Purpose

This *QTA* provides an overview of selected state strategies for addressing personnel shortages in the area of visual impairments (VI). Innovative or alternative routes to certification in six (6) states are profiled to give specific examples of state approaches to personnel preparation and certification in this area.

Background

Project FORUM at the National Association of State Directors of Special Education (NASDSE) collaborated with the group organized to identify the issues affecting personnel preparation and certification in the area of visual impairments, called the National Plan to Train Personnel to Serve Children with Blindness and Low Vision (NPTP). A previous collaboration by Project FORUM and this group -- both funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) -- prompted Project FORUM and the NPTP group to review state policy issues related to the preparation of educators who work with children who are blind or visually impaired. The information obtained in the prior activity is summarized in the document, *Blindness and Visual Impairment: Personnel Needs*.[1]

While preparing the above document, a number of state strategies emerged in response to a question about how states use emergency licenses/certifications as a temporary remedy for personnel shortages. States describe their strategies in many different ways. Some use the term "innovative," others refer to their programs as "specialized," and a smaller number of state activities are thought to be "alternative" programs or routes to certification/credentialing. In order to explore these issues further and to offer information to other states that are looking for solutions to personnel shortages, Project FORUM and NPTP profiled activities in six states. The six states were identified by key stakeholders in the field of VI.

Terminology

Some states allow a continuum of options for obtaining VI certification, including an alternative approach. Therefore, for the purpose of these profiles, *alternative certification* included any path

[1]For a copy of this document, please contact NASDSE at (703) 519-3800 or www.nasdse.org and request the document by name and #PFR-915.

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toward certification that does not involve traditional enrollment in a defined set of courses while in residence at an institution of higher education (IHE). Some states have programs, such as *distance learning*, that may be considered innovative or specialized, but not alternative. These programs have also been outlined.

Procedure

Six states were selected for profiling: Hawaii, Iowa, North Carolina, Texas, Utah, and West Virginia. Project FORUM, assisted by the NPTP and staff from the American Federation for the Blind (AFB), developed an interview protocol. Telephone interviews were then conducted with state directors of special education, other state education agency (SEA) staff, educational service center staff, superintendents and administrators from schools for the blind, and administrators and faculty from IHEs. The interviews took place in August and September 1999 and lasted between 30 and 90 minutes each. A total of 13 people were interviewed. The state activities are profiled on the following pages in the order in which they were established, with the longest running program first.

Texas

Origins of Program

Texas' Alternative Certification Program (ACP) in VI was established in 1990 in response to severe teacher shortages and the need expressed by local education agencies (LEAs) for more practical, rather than theoretical, approaches to personnel development. At this point, Texas already had state rules and laws, as well as specific goals and the approval needed to develop an ACP. (Code 21.049; 230.231 of subchapter H)

The original idea for the ACP program in VI came from a grant application to the SEA submitted by Region II Education Service Center (ESC) located in Corpus Christi, working in collaboration with Texas Tech University and Steven F. Austin University, the two universities that offer degrees in VI. A state model was then developed with technical assistance from the certification board. The activities were tailored to meet the competencies identified by various stakeholders, including parents, local districts, and experts on national standards. Since there were no state competencies on VI, the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) competencies for teachers of VI were used as the basis for the model. The state certification requirements for vision teachers, as well as the competencies identified for the state-level teacher competency tests (ExCET) were also incorporated.

The model was disseminated to other regional education service centers via electronic mail for other centers to use if this was identified as a need by their regional planning process. The model has been adopted and adapted by several other education service areas in Texas.

Program Description

Before the ACP is implemented, the roles and responsibilities, commitments, and quality of the program design are reviewed by everyone involved. Enrollment in the ACP usually comes after

the LEA has given the participant a VI assignment and awarded emergency certification. The program involves course work and mentoring at three levels. During the first summer, prior to beginning the school year in a VI position, the participants spend five to six weeks in all-day intensive course work taught by two program coordinators from the educational service center. After the initial summer session, the participants begin a year-long apprenticeship assignment. The students teach a class with emergency certification, and they are supervised and monitored by the vision consultant at the regional education service center. One work day and one Saturday each month is dedicated to additional course work at the educational service center.

When pre-service professionals take the entire course sequence, they take six standard three-credit courses and complete an internship in visual impairments. Except for the internship, a standard course length is 45 clock hours. The internship experience is 350 clock hours (as per the CEC guidelines). Therefore, students complete 270 hours of course work and a 350 hour internship. Although the program is not affiliated with any university, the regional education service centers have used university personnel to help teach the courses. Students must receive at least an 80 percent on all assessments during the program courses, pass the state-level teacher competency tests, and successfully apply what they have learned in their courses.

Recruitment of Students

The LEA collaborates with the education service center to recruit students for the ACP and fill apprenticeship assignments. A selection committee including the district education director, the personnel director, and the superintendent chooses the final candidates for the program. The LEA then commits to hiring the participant as a teacher of VI for a minimum of 17 hours per week.

The ACP participants are usually certified special education teachers with a minimum of three years' teaching experience and at least a 2.5 grade point average. The number of teachers recruited and selected for the program is based on the number of children identified as needing VI services in districts in the region. Guidance is given to districts on how to determine need based on the following formula: 10-12 children constitute a full case load and a student who uses Braille counts as 3 students because of the intense amount of hours of direct service needed.

Special effort is made to recruit teachers who are committed to staying in the special education field and in the local school district. It is thought that the experienced teacher is less likely to move from the state or district than someone who is just starting out in the field of education. Although the program does not specifically target traditionally under represented groups, recruitment efforts have produced culturally diverse graduates representing the natural diversity of the region.

Funding

In the Region II ESC program in Corpus Christi, there is no cost to the student or LEA where the student works; however, in other regions there are varying costs to the students. It costs $4,500 per person to implement the ACP program, and the education service centers who sponsor teacher preparation efforts typically use a special pot of IDEA Part B discretionary funds,

earmarked by the state to support services to students with visual impairments to support the programs.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

According to the SEA staff, there are few problems with the ACP in Texas. In fact, the program is considered to be thriving and continuously improving, especially to keep up with the demands of drastically changing technology. As experience with the model increases, monitoring and adjusting the program in response to the latest research and technology is easier. After the first year the model was implemented and the first class of teachers completed the program, the program was evaluated by the SEA. The initial expectations of SEA and IHE staff were surpassed. ACP graduates have consistently surpassed the state average on the state-level competency test, and have performed as well or better than IHE graduates in VI. An evaluation component is built into the program. It was approved by the State Board of Educators and SEA.

One challenge that has yet to be resolved, is that the course work obtained under this model is not recognized by the certifying body for orientation and mobility instructors. Graduates of an ACP program who wish to become dually certified, must retake such basic courses as Anatomy and Physiology of the Eye, that are typically required by both university vision programs and O&M programs. This creates a barrier to meeting the need for O&Ms in the region.

Because of the extreme shortage of teachers when the program was first implemented in 1991, the first ACP cohort included 18 students. There is now an average of six students in each cohort. To date, the regional education service centers have graduated approximately 45 teachers from the Region II ESC alternative program based in Corpus Christie, 30 from a West Texas program which included several large, but sparcely settled regions and 15 or 20 from the Region XI ESC Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Program. The state is well on its way to reaching its goal for the number of certified VI and O&M teachers needed, and is likely to surpass it.

In the Region II ESC program, there has been a 100 percent retention rate in the field of special education and 85 percent of program graduates have stayed in the area of VI since 1991. Moreover, most graduates have stayed in the state which is attributed to the fact that the region and district staff members are identifying and recruiting "home grown" individuals for the program. Approximately five participants have gone on to receive endorsement in O&M, too. Speech therapists, diagnosticians, and special education directors are just some examples of the roles individuals had before entering the alternative program, and it is more cost effective for the district to have personnel prepared in dual roles.

The program has evolved since its inception and been adapted slightly by other regional service centers based on experience and local need. One such change is that the SEA now requires that all potential VI teachers pass a state-wide Braille competency test for certification, in addition to passing the test examining VI specific knowledge. This requirement addresses the need for teachers to go beyond demonstrating proficiency in Braille to prove that they have developed strategies for *teaching* competency in Braille. The state includes a Braille competency test in

addition to the test of other skills and knowledge related to teaching students with visual impairments. Potential VI teachers must pass both tests in order to become certified.

Due to the success of the ACP, there actually may be a decreased need for the program in the future. Since there are now enough local VI teachers to observe in each region, students are no longer required to travel to the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired. Although this demonstrates the progress of the ACP, a potential VI teacher is likely to observe a wider range of students and interventions at the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired than in the local school system. Initially, some LEAs complained that VI program graduates did not have enough practical knowledge and that the universities were placing too much emphasis on theory. However, since the inception of the ACP, the universities have made improvements to the traditional university personnel preparation programs by including more opportunities for practical applications of the VI knowledge and skills learned.

North Carolina

Origins of Program

Over the past 25 years, North Carolina went through several attempts to set up a university program in VI. The state has had an alternative certification process in place for the past eight years. When the alternative program was developed, there was much collaboration between North Carolina Central University (NCCU) and the SEA. NCCU was reviewing the alternative VI program in Texas and the SEA was examining Kentucky's model, which has a stronger emphasis on distance education. In the end, components of each of the programs were integrated to form the latest North Carolina model, which has been in effect since 1998. Competencies were devised based on the national standards of the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) and CEC. Both regular education and special education guidelines and competencies have been applied to the VI program.

Program Description

There are currently three "tracks" for receiving certification in this area, although not all would be considered alternative. In the first case, individuals with a regular education license can take 18 semester hours (six courses) for a VI license at an IHE. All in-person courses are offered at the School for the Blind, which serves as a satellite site for the vision department of NCCU.

The second track is for an individual who already holds a special education license. Such an individual must take only nine semester hours of course work through a combination of IHE classes and state approved workshops and institutes, mostly in the summer. Courses are offered evenings, weekends, and summers, and it is possible for a candidate to complete the program by taking only weekend courses.

A third track is available, based solely on the severity of personnel need at the time. In this track, an individual with a bachelor of arts degree from a four year college, a 2.5 grade point average, and some VI experience, can obtain VI certification by taking 18 semester hours. This lateral approach for students who do not hold a teaching degree was initiated because of the

terrible shortage of personnel in the VI area. This third track has been eliminated and reintroduced over the years and remains an option with the current program. However, due to the high level of enrollment in the pre-service and distance learning tracks, there are no students currently enrolled through this lateral track.

When candidates begin the alternative certification program they are given a provisional license to teach. In order to maintain this license, they must take six semester hours each year. Most course work for the ACP is done via electronic mail. Other forms of distance education technology (e.g., satellite and video conferencing) are also being introduced. There is a mandatory practicum for all students who do not complete their course work through an IHE, but students with a special education license are exempt from the practicum requirement. Internships are conducted at the School for the Blind, as well as public schools and pre-school programs.

The program takes between two and three years to complete, depending on the track and prior experience of the student. Local schools are responsible for mentoring students for two years, according to the state procedure for all new teachers. Once the program has been completed, the graduate receives a permanent license which must be renewed every five years. VI teachers are required to take 15 credits over the five year period to keep their license current.

Recruitment of Students

Most students are recruited by the state through local school districts. For example, a local education agency (LEA) may ask a special or regular education teacher if s/he would be interested in teaching in the area of VI. NCCU and the Department of Health and Human Services have an agreement with the SEA whereby potential candidates are encouraged to enter a Master's program at an IHE. If that is not possible (i.e. geographically prohibitive), students may attend NCCU during the summer. While some teachers self-select the program, most teachers are recruited through the local school system. Since enrollment at the School for the Blind has declined, the number of local teachers recruited for the program has increased.

Currently, a total of 53 students are taking VI courses. Seventy-five percent of the students are enrolled in the licensure-only program, while the other twenty-five percent are seeking master's degrees. The first cohort of students is scheduled to finish the program at the end of the 2000 school-year. Since NCCU is a historically Black university, African Americans are more easily targeted for the program. However, there are only a few Black participants in the alternative program. One explanation for this may be that many graduates are offered high bonuses to sign contracts to teach in other states and do not stay in North Carolina, leaving a smaller pool of in-state candidates from traditionally under represented groups who are seeking additional licensure.

Funding

Funding for the pre-service program is provided through state and federal scholarship loans. Graduates who fulfill a two-year teaching commitment for every funded year do not have to repay their loans. The distance learning program depends on state and federal funding. The state

legislature provides the bulk of this on-going support, while federal personnel funds cover the remaining portion. Local schools are responsible for supporting students who enter through the lateral "track" with their own personnel funds. This funding approach is considered cost-prohibitive for most schools and is the least attractive option.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The current ACP program is still in its early stages, but the high enrollment rate is encouraging. Historically, most teachers who complete the program have continued to take courses and remain dedicated to teaching within the area of VI. Those who enter the alternative program after teaching for a few years are more likely to continue in the profession than those who recently graduate with a teaching degree. Ongoing assessment of student and personnel needs drives program improvement. Some of the challenges that remain are technical issues (satellite reception due to geographic layout), funding issues (more consistent federal support is needed to supplement state funding), and logistical issues (differing summer schedules among districts).

Utah

Origins of Program

Utah addresses shortages in VI through its Multi-University Consortium Teacher Preparation Program in Sensory Impairments, which has been in place since 1994. When this consortium was first developed, there were no teacher training programs in visual impairments in Utah. In the past, Utah has struggled to maintain funding for a variety of VI programs. A program at Brigham Young University (BYU) was discontinued after a number of years when one strong leader retired. A summer program at the School for the Blind, required of all newly hired teachers of VI, met some of the needs in Utah, but was not considered a viable long-term solution.

In 1989, the State Office of Education, At Risk Division and the University of Utah (U of UT) established funding through the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development (CSPD), and a private foundation grant through the School for the Blind, to develop the Sensory Impairment Teacher Preparation Program. The program combined vision and hearing impairment areas to increase enrollment and be more cost effective and efficient. However, the federal flow-through funds were discontinued as a priority for this area, and a request by advisory board members to university department heads to continue the teacher training programs was denied. The Coalition for People with Disabilities (including parents from the Advisory Board) then approached a Utah House Representative to sponsor a bill to fund the teacher training program. After a strong statewide lobbying effort, House Bill #295 became effective in 1994 and provided an ongoing $200,000 annual appropriation for a multi-university consortium of teacher preparation programs in visual or hearing impairments (or both). This appropriation supports the program faculty and has been the primary funding source for the teacher training programs.

Program Description

The Multi-University Consortium Teacher Preparation Program in Sensory Impairments originally involved the U of UT, Utah State University (USU), and BYU. Currently the special education departments of the two public universities are involved, and although BYU needed to withdraw, it remains very supportive of the program. The program is designed to meet Utah's certification guidelines and standards for teaching in the area of VI. Students must be certified in special education to teach VI, and students without elementary or secondary education certification must take 12 additional semester hours of course work. To be licensed as a teacher in VI for students of ages 5-21, thirteen courses are required -- six special education core courses that cover ages birth through 21 and seven courses specifically related to VI. The seven VI courses, offered every year, are provided through distance education and on-campus options. To reduce costs, the U of UT regular tenure track faculty teach the special education core courses and adjunct faculty teach the VI courses. Medical doctors, VI specialists, full-time clinical faculty members, social workers, and personnel from the School for the Blind all serve as adjunct faculty. The position of the Program Director is key to the functioning of the whole Sensory Impairments Consortium. The program has experienced very little turn over in staff and most of the staff have been with the program since its inception. The teaching staff meet every semester and also participate in training (i.e., interactive video system).

Students maintain on-going contact with a faculty member throughout the semester by telephone and electronic mail and there is no other program facilitator involved. Frequently the student is the only person at the distance site, but the faculty member will visit as needed – usually to support the student during the Braille literary class. The on-campus classes at the U of UT are videotaped when they are taught and the information and materials are sent to students at remote sites ahead of time so all students take the course at the same time. More sophisticated methods of using the computer, such as chat rooms, have not been established at this time. Interactive television is used minimally due to costs and scheduling with the Ed Net System (the statewide interactive television system). Currently, one class is conducted via the interactive television method.

Students with certification or previously completed course work may finish the program in one year, but most students take two years. Generally, students are already employed as teachers with full certificates or on provisional certificates. However, a couple of students have come from border states. There is also a certification program for teachers interested in teaching children from birth through five years old. These students must be certified in early childhood special education and complete an endorsement in VI. Several years ago, this early childhood program collaborated with the Utah State Office of Education and the Health Department to write standards designed to meet the requirements for both agencies. There is also specific funding available for the students who seek certification in early childhood.

All students are required to complete a practicum, including 400 clock hours of student teaching that is supervised by a teacher of VI. For students who are already working, some of their assignment can be completed within their own system. However, to get a broader range of experience, they must also teach outside of their classroom, either during summer programs or at the School for the Blind's summer program. Supervision comes from the early childhood special

education program when the VI faculty needs to consult on a particular early childhood issue. If the participants are working part-time, they can student teach over a full year with supervision from the full-time clinical faculty person.

Recruitment of Students

Initially, there were quite a few teachers from the School for the Blind who were students in the program. Some were teaching on letters of authorization (temporary certificates) and needed appropriate certification; others came from local school districts. The program is tailored to the needs in Utah and students are not recruited from out-of-state. Recruitment activities are conducted at the IHE campus, and targeted toward students in regular education and related programs (e.g., communication disorders). Approximately one half of the students begin with certification in elementary or secondary education.

Significant efforts have been made to attract students from traditionally under represented groups, but results have been slow until recently. Recruitment of under represented students began when the federal funding for stipends was received. Local special education directors assisted with recruitment efforts, which were concentrated in the southern area of Utah where there is a sizeable number of Native Americans. Potential recruits from under represented backgrounds sometimes do not have the prerequisite courses for the program. Helping these students gain the prerequisites has been very challenging. Recruiting such students has been time consuming and difficult. Two or three students from traditionally under represented groups enroll in the program each year and there is currently one Native American student in the early intervention program and one native Spanish-speaking student in the VI program, out of a total of 24 students.

Funding

The primary financial incentive offered to students is stipends, which are available to those enrolled in the vision, hearing, and birth through five programs. The Special Education Departments from both the U of UT and USU collaborated on a federal grant and received $300,000 for stipends annually over a three year period. The grant is currently in its third year, and future plans and options are being discussed. On-going funding from the Utah legislature pays for the program instructors.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

There are 24 students currently in the program. Eight of these students were certified this past summer and 12 more students are expected to be certified by next summer. Approximately one-half of the students complete the program every year. Most of the students stay and teach in Utah. Three years of data are currently being gathered for the state legislature. The program is not certified by the Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER), but some of the students have received AER certification. AER guidelines were followed when the program and courses were established. The program is evaluated by the U of UT on a regular cycle every three and five years. The Special Education Department also

has an evaluation system and courses are reviewed each semester. Changes have been made based on these evaluations.

Iowa

Origins of Program

The Iowa Braille School (IAB) has provided professional development for teachers of VI for many years. The current teacher training initiative began three years ago when Iowa was having difficulty recruiting teachers of VI. This initiative replaced a program that had been discontinued because it did not meet university standards. The current program is in the first year of the second cycle of courses, which will end in August of 2000.

Program Description

Teacher training in VI in Iowa is currently a collaboration among three partners, the University of Alabama (UAB) at Birmingham, the IAB, and the Iowa SEA. The importance of collaborative relationships in solving the teacher crises was emphasized by these partners. Iowa requires that teachers in VI also be certified in general education. Eight courses are needed for Iowa certification in special education with a specialization in the area of VI. In addition to six VI-specific courses, students take courses in consultation and vocational preparation for secondary students to receive special education certification. The general education courses are available from in-state universities, and all six VI courses are completed through UAB. Certification in VI is birth through 21 and the course work covers this age spectrum.

The teacher training program has both an on-campus and distance education component. Through the Iowa Communication Network (ICN), an interactive television network that connects all of the Iowa schools and public agencies, some classes are taught on campus and parts of some classes are broadcast on the ICN. Because a variety of methods are used, whole classes are not conducted through the ICN, especially when hands-on training and demonstration are needed.

A faculty member from UAB is the primary instructor for the courses along with other qualified UAB appointed faculty. Practicums are supervised by the UAB faculty during summer school and the regular school year. Three hundred clinical hours are required for the practicum, and students can select a setting to meet their individual needs. As part of the program, students develop a portfolio and participate in comprehensive exams. UAB is accredited by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) and is in the application process to receive certification from AER.

Recruitment of Students

The IAB communicates with the Intermediate Educational Units in Iowa about the teacher training opportunity. The prerequisite for participation is teacher licensure in either elementary, secondary, or special education. The teachers in the first cycle of training were primarily from the IAB. These teachers held multi-handicapped licensure and were seeking certification in VI.

During this second cycle, more participants are from public schools. There is no particular effort geared to recruiting from traditionally under represented groups at this time. The minority population in Iowa is approximately four percent of the general population.

Funding

If the participant teaches at the IAB, all tuition costs are covered. Participants not employed at the IAB are responsible for their own tuition; however, the IAB attempts to provide some assistance. Currently, there are seven courses in the program offered through UAB because a technology course was recently added as an optional course. Each course costs the university $10,000, and although some students do not need all the courses offered due to previous educational experiences, the $70,000 that is needed to fully fund the program comes from the State of Iowa, an endowment from the IAB, and tuition from people who are not employed by the IAB. Recipients of the tuition support, who are employed at the IAB, are required to stay on staff at the IAB for at least a year.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The first cycle of teacher training in VI was offered in a year. This was considered too short a time frame for the six UAB courses and was extended to two years, which seems too long. If this opportunity is continued, 18 months will be considered. Thirteen of the 14 graduates from the first cycle are teaching in VI; one left for personal reasons. The current cohort of students consists of nine teachers. Some students are employed as para-professionals and seven teachers are working toward a Masters Degree from UAB. Twenty-three teachers will be certified after the two cycles, which has helped alleviate teacher shortage in Iowa. Fourteen teachers were certified in the first cycle and nine will be certified after the second cycle. Some of the graduates are visually impaired.

Hawaii

Origins of Program

Hawaii is one of 12 states participating in the University of Northern Colorado's (UNC) VI training through distance learning. Hawaii was chosen to profile because of its unique geographic location and severe personnel shortage. The state of Hawaii has never had a teacher training program in the area of VI, and for years there has been a personnel shortage in this area. In the past, Hawaii recruited from the mainland, but high caseloads, culture shock, and the high cost of living, combined with low teacher pay, made retention a major challenge. With the implementation of the Felix Consent Decree in 1994[2], there was extra pressure on the state to identify and provide appropriate services to all students. With an identification rate that has more than doubled since 1994, Hawaii desperately needed personnel in all special education areas. In August 1998, the Administrator of the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind began negotiating with UNC, which has federal funding from OSEP to provide distance education

[2]Although the Felix court case did not involve VI, attention to the case contributed to an increased identification rate in VI.

through its *Western Regional Consortium*. The Hawaii certification office worked with staff at UNC on the certification issues.

Program Description

The program started in the summer of 1999 when two faculty members from UNC went to Hawaii for a five-week period to offer three VI courses. Classes were held at the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind. UNC regular and adjunct faculty will teach a second summer of courses in 2000. The entire course sequence will take 18 months, and students will receive a masters degree in VI upon completion. The students in Hawaii take the same courses as students on-site at UNC and other distance education students.

One of the two 1999 summer faculty members met with all the students briefly in an advisory capacity and will continue to provide guidance as students complete three more semesters of distance-learning courses through UNC. In addition to regular contact with the teaching faculty, this faculty member is available to give on-line assistance to students once a week. Although the details regarding supervision and practicum experiences were not yet completely worked out at the time of the interview, the Administrator for the Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind is likely to play a major role in those activities.

Recruitn ent of Students

About six months prior to the start of the program, the UNC distance learning program was advertised throughout the school system. Interested educators were asked to contact the university for more details, and approximately 70 Hawaii employees requested information packets. Thirteen completed the application process. The UNC staff reviewed the applications and accepted all 13; however, one student decided not to participate because she did not want to commit to taking a VI position. In order to qualify for the program, students must be certified to teach general or special education in Hawaii. Since Hawaii has a diverse population, no particular efforts were made to target traditionally under represented groups for the program. There is only one man among the 12 students, and about half of the students are of the *minority* White population.

Funding

Although there are still some details in the contract that must be finalized, the state of Hawaii will pay a little under $100,000 and the federal grant through UNC will pay about $100,000 to cover cost of the courses. Students have to pay for their books and personal living expenses—including housing—during the summer sessions. In exchange for funding, students must agree to work in the area of VI in Hawaii for three years. If all the VI positions are filled, program graduates must work in the special education field.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

Initially, there was concern that internet access would have to be arranged for the students, but all have access either at home or school. Online classes had just started at the time of the interview and no problems were reported.

Three of the 12 students who started the program were placed in VI positions for the fall of 1999. There have been no major complaints about the program and no one has dropped out. In fact, there has been positive feedback from supervisors in the field. The one concern is administration of the program in Hawaii. The Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind is already understaffed and this program has been a major challenge to initiate and implement as an "add on" to regular staff duties. It is hoped that the newly-trained staff will sufficiently address Hawaii's VI needs, so there are no plans to continue the program after the current 18-month cycle is complete. However, the program may be reestablished in a few years if the personnel shortage continues.

West Virginia

Origins of Program

Historically, West Virginia has certified teachers in a traditional manner that relied on IHE on-campus enrollment in a pre-service program. The State Board of Education has been developing policy related to licensure criteria. Teachers could not add specific teaching certificates to their license because the state did not have an IHE to offer the necessary course work in VI. Despite the fact that teachers are required to complete formal course work to add an endorsement to their qualifications, many provisional licenses have been approved. These teachers are given five years to complete a program leading to permanent certification. Although West Virginia studied other states' programs during this time, certification requirements remained traditional.

This process was deemed inadequate and program adaptations were made to bring in-service programs to the teachers. Many teachers earned master's degrees through these efforts. The state then began to rethink its traditional approach and moved toward providing credits through workshops, seminars and other professional development activities. As a result of these changes, West Virginia is developing a new VI certification program.

In the past, students received tuition reimbursement from the SEA for participating in VI distance learning programs from out-of-state IHEs because there was no in-state IHE program. Beginning in the fall of 1999, a program is being implemented involving three partners—West Virginia University (WVU), Marshall University (MU), and the State Department of Education.

Program Description

The three-year program in West Virginia involves a combination of distance education, independent course work and two summers at the School for the Blind. The program is expected to serve the entire state by bringing the learning to the students throughout the school year via distance education, and continuing with practicum courses during two consecutive summers. If student enrollment is clustered on a regional basis, weekend seminars may also be provided. Students who hold a four-year teaching degree can participate in the program to add a VI endorsement to their certification, or continue their studies with the option of completing a

master's degree. Fifteen to twenty students are anticipated for the 1999-2000 program. Students can enroll at either WVU or MU and credits are transferable.

Students have the same course requirements whether they hold a degree in special education or general education. Enrollment in two courses each semester is encouraged, and teaching in the area of VI will be permitted provided that the teacher enrolls in a minimum of six graduate hours annually. Students who are teaching in VI with a temporary permit may be given priority consideration for practicum experience.

Recruitment of Students

In order to participate in the program, students must have a bachelor of arts degree and a teaching certificate. Efforts are being made to recruit "homegrown" students from within the state. However, out-of-state candidates may be considered as the program grows, and out-of-state students will have the option of transferring into the program. The partners are currently developing a recruitment package to be disseminated to special education administrators and superintendents.

Funding

Federal discretionary money covers program costs. Students are committed to paying for the first credit hour, and the program covers all costs beyond that. There are no state teaching obligations for students who are accepting financial aid to teach in the state.

Outcomes and Lessons Learned

The program is just beginning, and it is said to be off to a good start. Though funding continues to be the greatest challenge, tailoring the course schedule to meet the needs of teachers already working full time has also been difficult. Program evaluation is planned, but the exact mechanism has not yet been developed. It will likely focus on how well the personnel shortages are being addressed rather than follow-up on individual graduates of the program.

Summary

Over the years, state strategies for addressing personnel shortages in the area of VI have evolved to meet state standards and funding requirements, while also trying to attract qualified students to fill long-term local needs. Rapidly emerging technologies have also affected program development. Distance learning opportunities have multiplied, opening up a variety of options to once geographically isolated areas and increasing collaboration across states. Moreover, technology has expanded the instruction available for serving students with special needs, including VI. Some states, however, have experienced technical difficulties related to logistics and reception. The tremendous changes in technology have also demanded constant updates in professional development activities and have put added pressure on states to recruit qualified personnel.

Most states confronting the issue of shortages in the area of VI offer a continuum of options for students seeking certification. The course requirements and time commitments vary according to the knowledge and experience of the program applicant. All of the states profiled use some sort of collaboration, including partnerships with IHEs, educational service centers, schools for the blind, and other state and local agencies. While some states rely on informal promotions of their VI programs, others target specific individuals or locations within the state in order to recruit students of a particular cultural or ethnic background. One program mentioned graduating students with disabilities. At least two of the states profiled emphasized the need to recruit "home grown" students to participate in VI programs. This is considered to be an important strategy for increasing retention. Other profiled states stressed the importance of recruiting teachers who have experience in the field because they are in a better position to know what to expect. Retention rates among seasoned educational professionals are higher than those of recent graduates from an IHE. Tuition support was also considered to be a recruitment issue. States felt that stipends and signing bonuses made recruitment efforts more successful.

Many of the difficult funding challenges faced by states addressing the shortage of personnel serving students with VI are similar to those in other low-incidence areas. Universities may hesitate to provide VI training programs because student enrollment is invariably low and funding is often inconsistent. Changing federal or state funding priorities can have major implications for programs. Many states have had to obviate established programs only to be forced to rebuild a few years later without the support of key personnel.

The states profiled have used some creative solutions to funding problems. Sometimes loans are forgiven after program graduates have fulfilled a particular teaching commitment within the state. Federal discretionary funds are used directly or indirectly through educational service centers. The special education departments within cooperating universities have applied for, and have been awarded, grant monies. Federal and state funding for professional development, as well as specific state legislation, have also maintained programs.

In light of the severe shortage of personnel in the area of VI, the specific approaches mentioned in these profiles are generally regarded favorably and few problems were cited. However, few of the highlighted programs have been replicated. There are some minor problems related to course credit toward certification versus endorsement in VI. Although program graduates are able to teach in the area of VI within their state, there is not always reciprocity across states. It may be difficult to transfer a specific endorsement to another state or to receive course credit in a related field. In most cases the programs do not offer a dual certification option. The programs generally certify teachers only in VI, making it necessary to seek related endorsements, for example in O&M, elsewhere.

Problems may also arise when students are rushed into teaching positions before they have had adequate course work and practicum experience because of the severity of local personnel needs. At least one IHE representative expressed concern that students who had not finished the required course work or internships were being certified and allowed to provide direct services to students with VI due to the shortages in the field. Effective communication between local districts, the SEA, and IHEs is important in order to prepare qualified staff in an efficient manner.

Closing Remarks

As was demonstrated by the profiles in this document, states are struggling with the issue of how to best prepare personnel to serve students with VI. The six states profiled here are not meant to represent the vast number of innovative programs available in the area of VI. Rather, they are intended to serve as examples of various state approaches to addressing this issue. A particular effort was made to include alternative programs, and only one established distance learning program was highlighted. It is hoped that the range of options described serves as a useful guide to other states considering the development of a VI program.

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